

RHODE ISLAND TRAFFIC STOP STATISTICS

DATA COLLECTION STUDY

FINAL REPORT:

Conclusions and Recommendations

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report provides an extensive analysis of traffic enforcement practices by law enforcement agencies in Rhode Island that took place in 2013-2014 and provides a comparison to the prior 2004-2005 study. The report presents four separate analyses of racial and ethnic differences for each community:

- A comparison of all stops by each municipal law enforcement agency with an estimated driving population for each community
- A comparison of stops of residents compared to the residential population of that community
- An analysis of the racial and ethnic differences in post stop outcome of issuing a citation vs. a warning
- An analysis of racial and ethnic differences in searches conducted by Rhode Island's law enforcement organization

The summary of findings and recommendations below are based on an analysis of 300,144 traffic stops conducted by law enforcement agencies in Rhode Island between January 1, 2013 and May 31, 2014.

OVERALL TRAFFIC ENFORCEMENT PRACTICES

- The most common categories of drivers stopped in Rhode Island over this period were white male drivers under the age of 31 who did not live in the community where they were stopped. In Rhode Island over this period 76.2% of the drivers stopped were white.
- The most common reason motorists were stopped in Rhode Island over this period was for speeding (37.1%) with equipment violations being the second most common reason for the stop (18.2%).

- A little more than half of the drivers stopped in Rhode Island received a citation (54.9%) and a little more than one-third (36.9%) of the drivers received a warning. The outcome of the stop varied considerably across Rhode Island communities. A very small number of drivers were searched (3.3%) and in about one-third of those searches (35.3%) did police find contraband.
- The frequency of traffic enforcement of residents varied widely across Rhode Island communities, ranging from 822 stops per 1,000 residents in Hopkinton to 74 stops per 1,000 residents in Tiverton.
- A similar variation exists in terms of the reason drivers are stopped. For speeding, for example, 87% of the stops in Foster were for speeding while only 8.7% of the stops in Providence were for speeding.

RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES

- In 29 Rhode Island communities, more non-white drivers were stopped than would have been predicted given the Driving Population Estimate (DPE). The six communities whose disparity was greater than 10 % merit further consideration.
- A review of the results of this analysis with the previous analysis conducted in 2004-2005 reveals that some communities are making progress in reducing racial and ethnic disparities in traffic stops and others less so. In 20 communities, the comparison between drivers stopped and the Driving Population Estimate (DPE) decreased in some communities quite substantially. However in 16 communities the disparity in drivers stopped vs. DPE increased. This may present an opportunity for law enforcement agencies to learn from each other.
- When looking at stops of residents compared to the residential population, the analysis found that 24 communities stopped more non-white residents than would have been predicted given the census population. In four communities the disparity is greater than 10% and merit further consideration.

POST STOP ACTIVITY

- Following the release of the 2004 report on racial disparities, law enforcement agencies in Rhode Island took a series of steps intended to eliminate any racial profiling that might have been occurring. The most significant change that occurred was a revision of the statewide training curriculum to more specifically address community concerns about racial profiling. These changes seem to have been very effective in the areas of post-stop activity. Since the 2004 report, citations to non-white drivers have declined in most communities, the rate of searches have declined in nearly all Rhode Island communities, and the productivity of the searches has increased.
- In all but ten Rhode Island communities, white drivers who are stopped are more likely to receive a citation than non-white drivers. In only four communities, there is a disparity of more than 5% where non-white drivers are more likely to receive a citation.
- Searches are rare in traffic stops and in many Rhode Island communities there are so few searches conducted that analysis of their search patterns must be viewed with caution. When we look only at the most discretionary searches, in all but four communities, non-white drivers are more likely to be searched than white drivers but in most communities these differences are very small.
- In both discretionary and extra discretionary searches, the statewide disparities experienced a decrease since the 2004-2005 study from 3.0% to 1.4% and 2.2% to 1.3%, respectively.
- In these most discretionary searches, white drivers are slightly more likely to be found with contraband (50.5%) than non-white drivers (40.5%). Here, again the statewide disparity has decreased since the 2004-2005 study from -4.2% to -10.1%.
- In another promising finding, no community is found to have consistently high racial and ethnic disparities across all our analyses. Some areas indicate a need for

further review in many communities but this analysis did not find any evidence of communities with significantly large disparities in all areas of traffic enforcement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This report outlines areas where significant progress has been made by law enforcement agencies in Rhode Island and identifies some areas where more needs to be done. As indicated above the vast majority of law enforcement agencies have changed their traffic enforcement practices in ways that have resulted in fewer citations being issued to nonwhite drivers, fewer searches being conducted on both white and non-white drivers and many more of those searches identifying contraband. Some of the reasons for these changes could be linked to an increase in community outreach functions by state and local law enforcement agencies that occurred over the past three years including, but not limited to, efforts to recruit minority applicants, participation in community events, and meeting with leaders of diverse communities and organizations that represent minorities (see Appendix C for more information).

In the analysis of traffic stops, however, some racial and ethnic disparities remain and, in a small number of communities, these disparities are high enough to strongly encourage law enforcement to look more closely at the causes of these disparities.

We recommend that:

- The State Police and the Rhode Island Police Chiefs Association continue their focus on addressing concerns about racial profiling through continued improvements to recruit and in service training and internal supervision. The efforts over the past six years seem to have resulted in a reduction in the level of racial disparities and an increase in the level of productivity of searches in a number of communities.
- Each law enforcement agency in Rhode Island carefully reviews all analyses for their jurisdiction to see if there are areas of concern

- Where appropriate, each agency should compare their results to the results in communities they consider to be comparable in terms of demographics or policing orientation.
- For all communities with large disparities in any of the analyses presented in the report they should review the data in more detail to determine if the disparities are of concern. Some areas they might review include looking at the disparity by time of day (e.g. is one shift the cause of the disparity) and where available by police district or sector.
- After a thorough analysis, the leadership of each agency should share the results with two primary groups. The first group should include officers in their agency so that they can examine the data and what it indicates about their enforcement activity. The second group should include the community. More importantly, law enforcement should seek out avenues based on the interpretations of the data in order to initiate a conversation with the community about biased policing.
- The conversations with the community can be difficult but experience indicates that these conversations can go a long way to increasing trust and confidence in the police by various groups. Experience in other states indicates that a successful way of initiating these conversations would be to go to an existing community group at a regular meeting of that group.
- Rhode Island Law Enforcement Agencies should be commended for the decision to continue to collect traffic stop data voluntarily. This represents a strong commitment to the drivers in Rhode Island that police agencies will have the ability to monitor their officers and intervene if concerns are uncovered.